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Beyond Conjunctures of Russia's National Future: Migrants and Refugees in Russia's Political Discourse in 2013 and 2014

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Within the framework of Russia's national identity politics, the chapter examines the political usage and public discussion of migration with regard two cases situated in opposite sides of the change that occurred in Russia between 2013 and 2014. First it is examined how the opposition's new front man, Aleksei Naval'nyi, used Muscovites' emphasised anti-immigration moods in his campaign of the Moscow mayoral election in 2013. Naval'nyi's campaign resulted as an extraordinary success when against all expectations he became the second in the race and nearly took the election into the second round. Naval'nyi's ultimate breakthrough into the federal level politics coincide with the year when Russia's anti-immigration moods reached the hitherto peak. Likewise, Nava'nyi's success was accompanied with even more worrisome trend from the Kremlin's viewpoint; the constant decrease of president Putin's public support. However, by March 2014 Putin's ratings were dramatically recovered and avenues for oppositional politics radically curtailed. The second case of the chapter focuses on this side of the change by examining prevailing media representations of Ukrainian refugees who superseded the role of migrants in the summer 2014 in Russia's public discussion. The chapter shows that dominant discourses of migration create a sort of continuum regardless of these dramatically changed political conjunctures. They evoke similar visions for Russia's ideal state of affairs in which an ethnisised hierarchisation of labour linked to the politically contextualized flows of foreigners plays the major role.

Introduction

In November 2013 the clear majority of Russians agreed with the statement 'Russia for ethnic Russians' (*Rossiia dlia russkikh*). This statement has become one of the major indicators in monitoring ethnic relations in Russia. According to the Levada Centre – the main conductor in measuring the perception of this statement – the overall number of its sympathisers in 1998 was 43 % while in late 2013 the number was 66 % (Levada 2013; Levada 2011). In light of these results the director of the Levada Centre, Lev Gudkov (2013), pointed out that Russians are not anymore

ashamed of supporting the statement which has been seen as the central signifier of ethnic nationalism in the multiethnic state. In today's Russia, following the collapse of the Soviet ideological tenet of nationless communism and holding the second place in the number of immigrants in the world (United Nations 2013), the growing importance and public support to ethnic nationalism can be seen as an intersection of ideational compensation for the lack of fixed national as well as state identity. Similarly, ethnic nationalism points at the overall dissatisfaction with the state's policies regarding the role of ethnically non-Russians (*ne russkie*). Hence, in late 2013 that overall support to Russia with ethnic Russians (66 %) was accompanied by the clear reluctance of immigrants from Southern Republics (61 %, only 6 % sympathised or respected them) and 71 % supported the slogan 'it's enough to feed Caucasus' (*Khvatit kormit' Kavkaz*) (Levada 2013). What is more, in November 2013 the public support of president Putin reached the deepest bottom so far; 'only' 61 % of Russians announced to trust him (which is alarming in the authoritarian presidential system), while, for instance in September 2009, while being prime minister, 88 % of Russians trusted him (Levada 2015).

It has become repetitiously confirmed since March 2014, after the annexation of the Crimea, that Putin's public support has recovered back to those of 2009; for instance, 88 % of Russians trusted Putin in October 2015. (Levada 2015). Regarding this sudden recovery, it prompts to ask how the the growing importance of migration in Russia's public life over the last 15 years is intertwined with the two sides of Russia's major political backbone; the political legitimacy of Putin before and after the revolution in Ukraine. This revolution in early 2014 – followed by Russia's dramatic political and military interventions into Ukraine – has been the hitherto most serious political conflict in the territory of the former Soviet Union after its collapse. Besides the conflict's serious international repercussions, the revolution marked a notable change in Russia's domestic politics, in the Kremlin's political performance in particular. The intensified usage of ethnic identifications along with the Kremlin's venture in Ukraine demonstrates that the realm of ethnic others and 'ours' has remained an elementary part of the regime's domestic legitimation, regardless of significant political changes that the year 2014 brought apparent in comparison to 2013 (Goode & Laruelle 2014). Although it would be an overestimation to argue that migration – as a central realization for ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences between people – would create a clear-cut variable for the Kremlin's political legitimacy, it plays a vital role in it. In this vein, my aim is examine how the issue of *incomers* (conciously avoiding here the loaded term 'migration' in Russia) is represented with regard to two political conjunctures, one in the latter half of 2013, and another in the summer 2014.

For the year 2013 I chose a sample of Aleksei Naval'nyi's views concerning migration during his campaign in the Moscow mayoral election, and for the year 2014 I chose a sample of articles published in the Russian mainstream media in the summer 2014 concerning Ukrainian refugees. In the selection of this group of data I used the Integrum databases.[1] My standpoint is that Naval'nyi as a major oppositional challenger of the Kremlin in 2013 is a key facet to the political usage of migration while the issue of Ukrainian refugees provides an important baseline to Russia's migration discourse in the domestically and internationally changed political circumstances. By comparing these two themes my goal is to clarify linkages and associations that migration and refugees as Russia's transnational reality generate in Russia' public understanding. Before moving to the closer examination of the selected samples I provide an excursion to the issue of migration and of its identity political ramifications in post-Soviet Russia.

Migration and Nationalisms in Putin's Russia

The major event in the gradual breakthrough of nationalist thoughts in Russia's post-Soviet politics was the formation of nationalist opposition against Yeltsin's Western oriented reformist policies followed by the Kremlin's response to this opposition over the course of Yeltsin and Putin eras. The constitutional crisis and bloody conflict in October 1993 was the momentum for diverse pro-Soviet and nationalist forces which allied against Yeltsin, and since the mid-1990s the cornerstone of the Kremlin's identity policies has been the so called patriotic centrism (Laruelle 2009: 23). While initiated by Yeltsin it was Putin who has greatly benefited from this idea in manipulating it to his advantage in eliminating ideological oppositions and encouraging political reconciliation of different factions through patriotic rhetoric (ibid.). In terms of nationalism, patriotic centrism represents Russia's (and the Soviet Union's) imperial continuum of the state nationalism, or politically correct imperial nationalism. The central function of this tenet aims to guarantee the people's unity in the multinational state. As such, reflected for instance in Putin's presidential campaign writing on Russia's nationalities issues in January 2012, under the pressure of large-scale protests of that time – and in particular, under the nationalist segment of the protests – Putin emphasised the importance of adhering the Russian cultural norms by ethnic minorities (Putin 2012). However, by the same token, for Putin the official nationalities policy must follow the Soviet-era vision of non-ethnic citizenship which similarly acknowledges the state's multiethnic

[1] Integrum is the largest collection of Russian and CIS databases covering a wide range of topics. At the beginning of 2014 Integrum contained approximately 500 million documents related to Russia. The scope of more than 7000 databases covers all national and regional newspapers and magazines, statistics, official publications, archives of the leading national and international information agencies, full texts of thousands of literary works, dictionaries, and more. For more see, http://www.integrumworld.com/about.html.

composition (ibid.). Following this tenet, the citizenship of 'sovetskii' (Soviet) has been replaced by 'rossiiskii' (citizens of the Russian Federation) in defining 'the banal nationalism' of the official state.[2] In this regard, the term 'russkii' as an ethnic category has remained pejorative and nationalistic. At the same time, the Soviet legacy of imperial non-ethnicity in Russia's nationalities policies has become the major source of dissatisfaction among Russian ethno-nationalists (Pain 2014). According to them, today's Russia follows the Soviet Union where non-Russian republics and autonomies were institutionalized in line with their ethnic stereotypes (for more on this, see Hirsch 2005). By contrast, the identification on the basis of ethnicity is not allowed to Russians who live in Russia (Pain 2014).

It is obviously true that the majority of Russians hardly align with this kind of nationalist interpretation in explaining the rapid growth of ethno-nationalist sentiments among Russians during the last ten years. Indeed, the connotation of the word *natsionalizm* has generally remained negative among the Russians (Dubin 2014), in addition to ethno-nationalists' relatively marginal role as a political movement. However, when nationalism is left aside and shifted from its ideological and political realm to the framework of xenophobia, that is, of ethnic and cultural 'others', the picture becomes different. While in 2005 the overall number of those Russians who sensed ethnic tensions in the region they live was 27 %, in 2013 the number was 43 % (Dubin 2014: 8). In a similar vein, the number of those who felt negative emotions with regard to comers from Caucasus, Central Asia and Southern countries had grown to 61 % (2013) from 43 % (2005) (ibid: 9). Anti-immigrant sentiments have become particularly strong in big cities, and in 2013 migration became the most acute problem among the Muscovites (55 % shared this view in comparison with 30 % in 2010) (ibid:10-11).

Antipathy towards migrants – almost exclusively perceived as people from Caucasus and Central Asia – has become the clearest indicator of ethnic nationalism, and even more importantly, an indicator of the change in the Soviet legacy of nationalism's overly pejorative associations. Russians are increasingly reluctant to share the view of the importance of the Soviet type of multi-national brotherhood or judging nationalism as a preliminary stage of fascism (see Levada 2013). Boris Dubin points out that the main source of the highlighted nationalism in Russia is internal; growing dissatisfaction concerning the state of affairs among the ethnic majority which results as the 'ethnification' of societal problems (Dubin 2014:14). Hence, migrants in Russia can be seen as victims of Russians' existing problems rather than seeing them principally as a collective threat to

[2] According this Michael Billig's classical notion, banal nationalism includes the most common and generally accepted forms of nationalism of a state; flags, coat of arms, sporting events, national songs, etc. (Billig 1995).

domestic security and order (according to this reasoning the latter explanation is predominant for Western European countries). In both cases migration can be seen as a central platform for the ethno-culturally framed counter-mobilisation. In Russia, however, as Emil Pain (2014: 50) points out, the political power (the Kremlin) has hitherto managed to use and manipulate ethnic nationalism in preserving the Soviet type imperial nationalism as the official backbone for its own political survival and legitimacy. While imperial nationalism precludes particular ethnic chauvinism – the governing role of ethnic Russians and the Russian language – larger avenues for the organization of ethnic nationalist groups have been restricted; official views and policies have been able to satisfy the majority of ethno-nationalist sentiments (ibid.). This seems to be particularly true regarding the split among oppositional nationalists since the annexation of Crimea (Iudina & Al'perovich 2014). Many of those nationalists who had viewed the Kremlin critically either changed their views since the annexation, or, at least, partially calibrated them with the changed situation.[3] Moreover, prospects for spontaneous imperial-nationalist movements (for instance, around political figures like Aleksander Dugin and Dmitry Rogozin, author's note) in challenging the regime have been minimal since their political ideas can be easily absorbed by the Kremlin (ibid.; Laruelle 2009). In sum, the dramatic recovery of Putin's public support in line with the annexation of the Crimea, the Ukrainian crisis and the war in Donbass, is a tangible proof of the regime's assimilative capacity. The revolution in Ukraine and its nationalist and anti-Russian segments were quickly totalised as manifestations of fascism whose ultimate conqueror is Russia/Soviet Union (the narrative of the Great Patriotic War). However, when the operation in the Crimea began, followed by fights in Donbass, the Soviet imperial narrative of anti-fascism was soon assimilated into the defense of ethnic Russians in the Crimea and in Donbass. For example, the term ethnic Russian (*russkii*) was mentioned approxiamtely 30 times in Putin's special 'Crimea speech' on March 18, 2014, suggesting that the operation was a defense of our people under hostile circumstances (Putin 2014).

Regarding the developments in Russia's domestic politics since the Ukrainian crisis, the repression towards the opposition does not concern the liberal, anti-War wing exclusively but the opposition's nationalist wing as well. One of the central actors and organizers of nationalists' annual event, *The Russian March*, Alexander Belov was arrested just before the 2014 march, and in 2015 another central figure of the event, Dmitry Demushkin, was prohibited to attend the event (Dergachev & Petrov 2015). Whereas the split among the nationalists with regard to Ukrainian event had

[3] A good example is Konstantin Krylov, the leader of the National Democratic Party, and a leading theorist of Russia's Europe-oriented ethno-nationalist movement (see, for example, Krylov 2014).

dramatically decreased the number of the march's participants already in 2014, in 2015 the split had become deeper, also boosted by administrative means; the previously large-scale march had transformed into few pint-sized demonstrations, some of them organized by pro-Kremlin instances (ibid; Laine 2015). The Ukrainian crisis seemingly plays the role for the public acceptance of the view 'Russia for Russians' as well. In July 2014 the acceptance of the statement 'Russia for ethnic Russians' dropped to 54 % from 66 % of October 2013 (Levada 2014). However, when measured in different terms, there was no actual change concerning the claim 'the government should restrict the flow of incomers'. In October 2013, 78 % of Russians supported the claim, in July 2014 the number was 76%, while in 2002 the number was 45 % (ibid.). In other words, xenophobic sentiments towards incomers over the last 12 years shows an unanimous growing trend. Let us now move to the year of 2013, and take a closer look to the year's major political event in Russia.

Migration in Aleksei Naval'nyi's Political Rhetoric

Within the large-scale protests in Russia in 2011-2012 the front man and personality of the new oppositional and protest movement, its development, expansion and novel techniques became Aleksei Naval'nyi, a lawyer and blogger, born in 1976. Indeed, after the regime recovered from the December 2011 shock and managed to calm down the protests by establishing Vladimir Putin in his third presidential term, it was Naval'nyi who distinguished himself as the most capable threat to the Kremlin's status quo. At the latest this happened during his successful campaign in the Moscow mayoral election in August–September 2013, his exclusion from the state-controlled television channels notwithstanding. Against all expectations and opinion polls, the second place in the election with 27.24% of the votes (Tsentral'naya izbiratel'naya 2013) proved his skills of combining highly creative use of the internet with traditional oratory on the streets. In terms of Naval'nyi's political freshness and his overall liberal agenda, his more or less explicit orientation towards ethno-civic nationalism has cast an interesting twist. Naval'nyi has been a key figure in Russia's national-democratic movement, which has challenged the traditional division of post-Soviet Russian nationalism between imperialists (either Soviet, or anti-Soviet) and ethno-nationalists (comprising various xenophobic and racist movements) (Laruelle 2014: 277–78; see also Moen-Larsen 2014).

I see two major reasons why Naval'ny's campaign rhetoric in the Moscow mayoral election offers a vantage point to the issue of migration in Russia. First, it was the election in which the development of Russia's xenophobic sentiments reached the peak, while being also the most concrete proof of the Kremlin's vulnerability under the open political competition in the uppermost important region,

Moscow. Second, Naval'ny was not the initiator of using anti-immigration in the campaign but it started the Kremlin's candidate, and the ultimate winner, the sitting mayor Sergei Sobianin (Verkhovskii 2014). Thus, in terms of polls of the election's results that predicted Sobianin's landslide victory and Naval'nyi's marginal support – eventually ended in the situation where the second round was close between Sobianin (51 % of votes) and Naval'nyi – it is essential to examine the issue of migration in Naval'nyi campaign rhetoric as a central ideational component in his electoral success.

Besides constant references to highly suspicious statistics concerning crimes conducted by migrants (Podrabinek 2013), Naval'nyi's populistic mastery payed also a close attention to personal, 'our common fear,' in the front of migrants. Here is a one quote from his numerous meetings with Muscovites – the way Naval'nyi took to the street separated himself from competing candidates as well – cited in the web-journal Bol'shoi Gorod (Aivazian 2013):

> 'Do you know that 40 % of the young male population of Tadzhikistan lives in Russia? And the majority of them in Moscow. Sobianin needs people who can be easily despoiled. Raisa Semenova, this question does not worry you only. 80 % of Muscovites answer in social polls that the topic of migration worries them', Naval'nyi answers.

Naval'nyi easily shifted the focus from the obvious unreliability of his statistical references to migration's emotional repercussions among Muscovites. For instance, in a meeting of voters in the *Vodnoi stadion* metro station, he pointed out that 'I'm not worried about numbers related migration, I am worried about every stolen handbag from women in my region' (Naval'nyi 2013a). When viewing recordings of these campaign meetings it is easy to see how Naval'nyi's links migration to its 'mundane realities', in particular, to corruption. Following his story during the meeting in the *Vodnoy stadion*, he mentions about pensioner, physically in good shape, who told him that he would like to work as a caretaker for the staircase where he lives, and whose official monthly salary is approximately 30, 000 rubles. However, this was not possible and a Tadzhik caretaker continues working there. According to Naval'nyi the reason for this is that the official salary of this Tadzhik is the same, 30, 000 rubles, but this Tadzhikistanin factually earns 12, 000 because is ready to 'pay' the remainder, 18, 000, to employing instances – authorities and companies – which provide the job (ibid.). While mediating everyday xenophobia via such emotionally resonating narratives, Naval'nyi avoids explicit ethno-nationalist aspects though migration is almost regularly the topic in his campaign speeches which evoked applauses in audiences (see, for instance, Naval'nyi 2013a; 2013b; 2013c). The best testimony of Naval'nyi's views on migration during the campaign can be found in the interview on the *Ekho Moskvy* radio station conducted by its editor-in-chief Aleksei

Venediktov which was dedicated to the topic of migration although other issues were also touched upon (Naval'nyi 2013d). When Venediktov aimed to highlight the economic importance of migrants in terms of labour as well as of the part of their salaries for the consumption in Moscow after remittances to their native countries,[4] Naval'nyi downplayed this argument by contrasting the realm of migrants with practices of a modern city:

> They receive money but, forgive me, they live here, they use metro which is subsidised by the city. They don't have insurance but they use medical services for which we pay. They use education (their kids). They…well, no matter whether we want or not want to admit, they conduct pretty many crimes (this statement is followed by a dispute with Venediktov, J.L.)…In addition, the most important thing: we cannot speak about the value of slave labour in terms of additional value simply because we speak about the value of slavery…These people, unfortunately, live as slaves. And if they were working according to the guaranteed 8-hour day with paid day offs, insurance, if taxes were paid from their salaries, then their salaries and the value of work would not differ from any Muscovite or from any other. By calling these people here to the position of slaves, dragging and settling them into houses to be demolished, into basements, apartments crowded by 30 people, we simply encourage those means of production which we had in the 19th century…The principal employer for migrants is the city, city instances or private instances which work for the city…whatever, we are those employers, we eventually pay these money…We must prohibit hiring foreigners within the year in order to stimulate companies to improve the productivity of labour.

This part of the interview encapsulates all the central components of Naval'nyi's political usage of migration during the campaign as well as pinpoints his liberal ethno-nationalism more generally (Laruelle 2014; Moen-Larsen 2014). The main thrust in Naval'nyi's argumentation is to prefer a situational logic of 'common reasoning' instead of pursuing ideologically loaded markers, for instance, nationalist or democratic (Lassila 2016). In other words, despite revealing his distaste to Central Asian and Caucasian migrants and stressing their cultural incompatibility with 'us', Naval'nyi equates the situation with the corruption. While corruption figures as a nodal point of his common reasoning, all ideologically resonating orientations – from racism and nationalism up to democracy and humanism – can be absorbed into this nodal point. Since 'we' want to live in a modern, rich megalopolis,[5] where 'we' as common taxpayers are the main driving force, migration and its cultural factors as well as the existing inhuman exploitation of slave labour simply hinder

[4] As it is known, the major part of GDPs of poor Central Asian States comes from migrants' remittances working in Russia, see for example, Michel 2014; Virkkunen & Fryer 2015.

[5] The budget of Moscow – according to Naval'nyi is 1.6 trillion roubles – proves that in fiscal terms Moscow should be one of the wealthiest cities in the world (Programma Naval'nogo 2013). Naval'nyi regularly used this aspect in openings his campaign meetings (see, for instance, Naval'nyi 2013a; 2013b; 2014c).

this development. In this vein, loopholes and controversies of his argumentation, for example in highlighting the number of crimes conducted by migrants (Podrabinek 2013), is systematically bypassed by a paradigmatic populist logic of equivalence pointed out by Ernesto Laclau (2005: 120): 'an equivalential chain (between various demands of citizens, author's note) can weaken the particularism of their links but cannot do away with it altogether'. In other words, Naval'nyi does not 'invent' corruption and migration as new political openings which would be tabooed by the political power; they are both recognised as a problem by the regime and official publicity (for more, see Hutchings & Tolz 2015: 185-191). Instead, he links these two into to the logic of equivalence. In this equivalence one problem is not highlighted at the cost of another, but the problem of migration is constructed as an acute with the problem of corruption, and eventually with the problem of the existing political rule (for more, see Lassila 2016; Hutchings & Tolz 2015: 185-191). Thus, despite the sitting governor Sobianin was the actual initiator of using the antipathy towards migrants in his election campaign, the migration for Sobyanin is strikingly framed in line with cultural prejudices without linking it to economic issues. Here is one of Sobianin's views in the beginning of his campaign (Sobianin 2013):

> It is better to people, who do not speak Russian well, who have a completely different culture, to live in their own countries. For that reason we do not welcome their adaption in Moscow…after working here they must go to their families, to their home in their countries…I think Moscow is a Russian (*rossiiskii*) city and it must remain like that. It's not Chinese, Tadzhik and not Uzbek.

However, immeadiately after this anti-migrant view in line with outspoken ethno-cultural prejudices, Sobianin continued

> (w)e are always happy with our guests, Russia is a multinational country, and all nationalities are mixed. It is very dangerous, simply extremely dangerous, particularly for our city to pick them (particular ethnic groups, author's note) up separately, to contrast ones with other cultures.

Sobianin's sudden reference to official nationalities principles which underscore multicultural brotherhood somewhat contradicts his explicit claim of cultural incompatibility between 'us' and migrants mentioned in the same breath. Regarding the excerpt's ethno-nationalist beginning, the usage of the term *rossiiskii* (citizen of the Russian Federation) instead of *russkii* (ethnic Russian) – which would be more plausible in such context – is contrived as well. Although the controversy in question does not allow us to judge that Sobianin's anti-immigration views are simply the opportunism of the sitting mayor in the face of Muscovites' dramatically increased anti-immigrant sentiments, it anyway shows Sobianin's dependence on official views in relation to migration; outspoken xenophobia is followed by ritualistic mentions of multinational state. Likewise,

Naval'nyi's longstanding goal of demanding visas from citizens of the Central Asia, and repeatedly mentioned in his campaign (Naval'nyi 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014d), is not touched upon. While various tightening measures has been recently introduced to migrants from the Central Asia – Sobianin referred to them in his campaign – visas has been out of the question. This geopolitical dimension in terms of sustaining direct links and influence upon Central Asia is the main explanation for the Kremlin's reluctance to establish the visa regime for these countries (Virkkunen & Fryer 2015).

Going back to Naval'nyi, the complexity between territorial borders and ethno-cultural features fuels his link between the fight with corruption and migration, although his constant demand for the visa regime concerns Central Asian states which do not belong to the Russian Federation. Here an important practice of corruption – and obvious facet of the Kremlin's geopolitical control over these states – is to grant Russian international passports to citizens of these states. According to Naval'nyi, Russia granted 500 000 international passports to citizens of Kyrgyzstan in 2013 alone (Naval'nyi 2013d). Since such measures seemingly torpedo attempts to require various kinds of permits to arrive and work in Russia – for instance, quotas for foreign labour (see below) – Naval'nyi sees that the visa regime is the central means in cutting down corruption and the flow of migrants. It is noteworthy that in this case Naval'nyi regularly forgets 'illegal' as an attribute for this particular category of migrants which is hardly coincidence (Naval'nyi 2013d). In other words, migrant is depicted as a facet to illegality, extended to illegal practices of the existing rule.

In terms of Russia's multiethnic composition, the ethnic dimension of migration does not follow the state borders of the Russian Federation. The same antipathy which is posed on migrants from the states of Central Asia is targeted at habitants of Russia's Caucasian territories, particular those from Chechenia and Dagestan, the territories that 'should not be fed anymore' (Levada 2013). Whereas the demand of visa regime for these people is a far more complicated issue than for Central Asians, explicit ethno-nationalist markers (implying the separation between Russia and its Caucasian subjects) with suspicious international comparisons are touched upon (Naval'nyi 2013d):

> Aleksei Venediktov: Senator McCain speaks that 'we have 20-30 million illegal immigrants'. He doesn't know either. The country with such a huge visa regime, and he doesn't know. Is this reason why you speak about this as well? Thirty people in an apartment. One arrives, starts a family, children are born. So, it's difficult to count on figures, right?
>
> Naval'nyi: Well, first of all, these are different things. In spite of that, USA builds the wall against Mexico and even Obama votes for the wall with Mexico but here it is told that 'please, come here'. In addition, it's necessary to understand that the people (this

> is important as well) who arrive from Mexico, are Christians, people from a more developed country. Here arrive rural population from very backward Central Asian countries, principally Muslims.

While cultural racism is eventually explicated, Naval'nyi constantly converts it to 'practicalities of Moscow's modern way of life', implying his responsibility as a potential mayor and not forgetting his sarcastic compassion to Central Asians (Naval'nyi 2013d):

> Today we are told 'you know, the number of Muslims has so rapidly grown in Moscow. Let's build mosques for all of them'. However, they still arrive. We cannot build mosques for all, and Muscovites are against the great number of mosques. Regardless of acknowledging their problems, while symphatising them, we must say 'my friends, we cannot take here all the citizens from Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan. We love and value them so much, but we introduce the visa regime and call them here in small numbers'.

For Naval'nyi backwardness associated with migrants fulfils the equivalence between migrants and corruption; corrupted regimes are backward and forced to resort to labour detrimental to Russia's modernization. This aspect becomes apparent when migrants as a group is related to Russia's closest ethnic neighbours, Belarus, and in particular, Ukraine. In an answer to Venediktov's question what is the difference between Ukraine and Tadzhikistan, Naval'nyi answers as follows (the excerpt above is another part of his answer) (Naval'nyi 2013d):

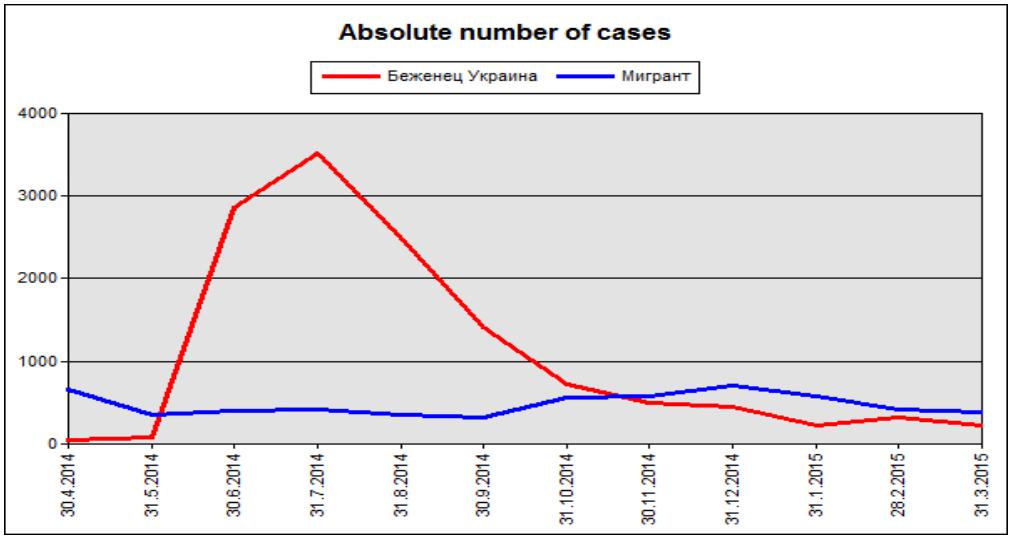
> First of all, as I mentioned, people who arrive from Tadzhikistan are youth coming from villages. 40 % of existing male Tadzhiks in the world, under 40 years old, they live here, in Russia. They are only capable for the least qualified jobs in addition to the completely collapsed system of education in Tadzhikistan. In general, there…from Ukraine can arrive programmers, from Ukraine can arrive a person…who can drive a tractor, complex vehicles, qualified worker in construction sites. From Uzbekistan such person cannot arrive – nobody teaches him there.

These views behind the extraordinary electoral success of the opposition's major candidate in surprisingly open circumstances in September 2013 were ended up to the dramatically different conjuncture that followed the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea and war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Not only situation for the opposition changed (Naval'nyi was arrested in late 2013 and condemned to house arrest) but also the political space for national identifications changed; Slavic brother Ukraine had become the enemy number one as a state. However, it prompts to ask how this change was represented with regard to the phenomenon which momentarily superseded the nature of migration in Russia in the summer 2014: refugees from Ukraine.

Refugees and Ukraine

In order to illustrate the role of Ukrainian refugees in Russia's media in the summer 2014, I conducted query with the help of Integrum databases statistics, by using search words 'Refugee Ukraine'[6] and 'Migrant'[7] . According to 2730 sources[8] in the period 1 April 2014 – 1 April 2015 we receive the following figure:

FIGURE 1: The frequency of mentions 'Refugee Ukraine' and 'Migrant' between 1 April 2014 – 1 April 2015 in the selected set of data.



The line whose peak is between 31 May – 31 October 2014 is the query 'Refugee Ukraine'. The figure shows the unanimous visibility of the Ukrainian refugees in the Russian media during the summer 2014, clearly superseding the relatively stable role of migrants. Next I was interested how the issue of labour – regularly spelled out by Naval'nyi with regard to migrants – was linked to the topic of Ukrainian refugees. By using Integrum's popularity rating[9] I searched the same set of sources (added by data consisting information of governmental organisations which was not

[6] In Russian Беженец Украина which matches with all items consisting these words and their derivations together.
[7] In Russian Мигрант which matches with all items consisting the word and its derivations.
[8] I selected those sources which generally cover the media in the Russian Federation available in the Integrum: Central Press, Central news agencies, Regional newspapers, Regional news agencies, Central internet publications and the Internet media, and four databases consisting of television and radio monitoring
[9] This popularity rating is based on Integrum's classification of the most relevant media on the basis of the selected databases (set of sources). In addition, the chosen items related to the given search words in the case of particular media (for example, the newspaper Kommersant) are ranked by Integrum based on the frequency of the search word(s) in the designated item as well as on outside links to the given item. For more, see Romanenko & Gerhenzon 2006.

available for Integrum's statistics) with parameters 'Ukraine labour'.[10] Despite the dispersion that the query yielded, among the first four items of the query's popularity rating three discussed on Ukrainian refugees in relation to labour (the items of the newspapers *Kommersant*' and *Izvestia* and the news agency *IA Regnum*). On July 11 2014 *Izvestia* published the article 'Oblast increases the quota for foreigners due to refugees' (Ivushkina 2014). In line with the newspaper's relatively clear pro-governmental stance, it is revealing that Ukrainians are not mentioned in the title. The issue is about necessity to increase the quotas in the Moscow oblast that the government has decided for the subjects of the Federation. Along with the Soviet-era echoes in which subjects and agents perform a kind of competition in fulfilling the state's tasks, now various regions are planning to 'ask the ministry of labour to increase quotas for their regions.' In the end of the article, after repeating various bureaucratic procedures that changes for these quotas require, an excerpt of the head of the Moscow oblast employment committee Mikhail Korotaev finally touched upon the ethnic underpinning of the existing restrictions for the foreign labour (Ivushkina 2014):

> There are 75 thousand vacancies in the oblast, of which 4, 8 thousand include accommodation. Refugees are completely eligible to apply these vacancies. I point out that employers prefer Ukrainians to migrants from Central Asia because the first speak Russian and among them are more qualified specialists.

On September 9 2014 *Kommersant'*, whose stance towards the government is more or less ambiguous, published the article, titled as 'Ukrainian refugees were placed into the reserve of labour' (Kozlov 2014). It reports recent decisions made by the government concerning the substantial simplification of the procedure in employing Ukrainian citizens escaping the war, and informed by the Prime Minister Medvedev:

> …we must provide an opportunity to these people, not only stay in the territory of our country, but also make immediate decisions about the employment…Moreover, there are many qualified persons among them; engineers, doctors, teachers.

Both of these articles pinpoint how the sudden reality of refugees is signified; while being exclusively linked to Ukraine, they are tangibly contrasted with migrants. And, whereas migrant is linked to labour, it is refugee which allows to specify the nature of foreign labour in highly idealized terms. Perhaps the most striking item of the query was the item by the information agency *Regions.ru*, published on June 26 2014 and titled as 'Refugees from Ukraine are the excellent means in fulfilling our lack of labour' (Kuzin 2014). The author is a representative of the Russian

[10] The actual query was marked as Украина рабочая сила /p3 which means that the words Украина (Ukraine) and рабочая сила (labour) appear in the frames of a group of 3 adjacent sentences.

Orthodox Church, a protoiereus Alexander Kuzin, who did not hesitate to evoke cultural aspects, preferring them to possible interests of employers:

> Ukrainians…are people of our belief and culture. For us this is much more preferable (solution in comparison to Tadzhiks)…I do not have anything against them (Tadzhiks, Uzbeks) but I'm just worried that we ignore the interests of our culture and of spiritual processes in the society. Of course, for our employers this is not profitable since the status of refugee requires that citizen rights must be followed…citizens from Tadzhikistan do not attempt to receive these rights. Well, is it profitable for Russia what is profitable for employers? Of course not. It leads to a serious social tension which has appeared repeatedly caused by the incompatibility of the people who arrive us from Central Asia: they don't want to live according to our traditions.

Despite Kuzin's views are expressed from different standpoints (a representative of the Church) and under different political circumstances than of Navalny, both of them address similar views concerning the nature of migration in Russia in the 2010's; perverted, or corrupted, interests of employers in sustaining the flow of migrants from Central Asia whose people are culturally backward (and incompatible) with Russian traditions (or ideal practices of society). It is worth noting that the Russian mainstream discussion on Ukrainian labour shows a complete lack of reflection in terms of internal divisions within Ukraine, which has been the core dimension of the conflict between the countries. This lack fits with the picture boosted by the official Russian propaganda since early 2014: Ukrainians are those who are with us, while those who rage the war against us are more or less marginalized fascists, although in other occasions, the contemporary Ukraine is fulfilled by massively prepared perpetrators, helped by the West in slaughtering Russians (Ukrainians in Donbass). However, this imperial blindness is not only linked to the fabricated mentalities under the war propaganda but can be seen in Naval'nyi's views as well, although from reverse, pro-Western standpoints. Naval'nyi has repeatedly pointed out the similarity between Russia and Ukraine, which implies an equal blindness to those Ukrainian nationalist views which underline the full separation from Russia as a nation-state. For instance, in the interview in the *Ekho Moskvy* in October 2014, Naval'nyi repeated the similarity between the countries and envisioned the necessity of the union between Russia and Ukraine (Naval'nyi 2014). As a mirror image to Putin's visions in which Russia's Eurasian course is the guideline for Ukraine, for Naval'nyi Ukraine's pro-Western course should be the orientation for Russia. In the realm of migration, both of these political opposites are entangled with the idea of seeing Russia as a powerful modern state with strong ethnic preferences.

Conclusions

While the overall negativity of the word 'migrant' among many ethnic Russians is not a surprise regarding the rapid growth of xenophobic sentiments, the positive framing of Ukrainian refugees in the mainstream media should be related to the extreme anti-Ukrainian propaganda in Russia's official media since early 2014. On the one hand, the sharp contrast which emerges from the comparison between the Ukrainian state and Ukrainians fits with the Kremlin's assimilative capacity in instrumentalizing nationalisms – ethnic and imperial – for its political legitimacy. On the other hand, the link between the excutive political power and the mainstream media, regardless of their close relations in Russia, should not be seen in too straightforward manner. As Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz (2015: 252) point out, we should not oversimplfly the relationship between the Kremlin and the state-aligned media in terms of priviledging transitive meaning, conveyed from the state to the media, over transactional meaning which arises from multi-directional interactions involving state, media, popular and other discourses. In comparing Naval'nyi's campaign rhetoric on migration and the mainstream media views on Ukrainian refugees, we see that both views – let us generalise them here as oppositional and pro-governmental – adapt into common persisiting discourses concerning migration, labour and modernization, instead of a situation in which oppositional anti-migration rhetoric would be replaced by the absence of Central Asian migrants for the sake of Slavic refugees. Yet, it is obvious that the state-controlled public discussion has partially managed to surpass domestic political concerns (migration as one of the most acute one) by harsh anti-Western and anti-Kiev propaganda, as the Integrum statistics above and the cited opinion polls indicate. Whereas the number of Ukrainian refugees in the summer 2014 was the fact which cannot be neglected whatever practices the state's media follow (centralized partisan or more democratic), it is a political choice to frame these refugees with regard to migrants along with existing ethnic and cultural perceptions. From the Kremlin's viewpoint, a transitive meaning would mean a straightforward idea to surpass popular prejudicies towards migrants without mentioning them, or even highlighting their importance in terms of Russia's Eurasian orientation, rather than mirroring them to Ukrainians in negative terms. In other words, public discussion on Ukrainian refugees draws transactional meaning along with existing popular discourses.

This allows to suggest that the discussion on migration in Russia in relation to the major political junctures divided by the annexation of Crimea has not changed the basic current of this discussion. As echoed by Naval'nyi, Ukraine has figured as a wishful counterpoint to migrants, predominantly associated as the culturally alien to Russians. As such, this overall reluctance to everyday realities

of Russia's multicultural composition and of recently emphasized Eurasian allies in the Central Asia pinpoints the major challenge for the regime in sustaining the idea of multiethnic empire, regardless of various manipulations of ethnic nationalism posed by the official media discourse (Hutchings & Tolz 2015). Regarding the success that Naval'nyi gained in the mayoral election, it can be argued that Naval'nyi 'civilized' and 'normalized' (see Moen-Larsen 2014) ethno-nationalist and racist underpinnings of the dominant migration discourse in depicting European and 'natural' conditions for Russias's modernization. It is thus noteworthy that Russia's extreme anti-Western propaganda related to the Ukrainian conflict – launched by 'Western backed fascist junta in Kiev' – is generally absent in the public discourse on Ukrainian refugees. Instead, this post-Crimean refugee discourse easily conforms to the discourse advocated by Naval'nyi before the crisis in which migrants and Ukrainians are contrasted in terms of qualified and backward labour, and justified by cultural factors. It is also noteworthy how particular expressions such as 'illegal migrant' and 'migrant', or 'refugee' and 'Ukrainian', are used interchangeably. The migration discourse, in both political junctures, shows the vagueness regarding the major division of Russia's nationalisms, imperial and ethnic (Laruelle 2009; 2014). For Naval'nyi obvious emphasis lies on the ethnic nationalism but his views on Ukraine illustrate that particular imperial twist is present as well (Lassila 2016). Whereas the annexation of Crimea brilliantly shows how the explicit imperial operation was transformed into 'defense of ethnic Russians', the dominant refugee discourse shows – not least due to the conflation between Ukrainian and refugee – how ethnic and imperial nationalisms are intertwined with seemingly sincere willingness to help people in distress. On the one hand, this help is motivated by the ethnic and cultural closeness, and, on the other, the discourse is overly blind to Ukraine's internal political divisions and its nation-state dimensions.

In terms of discursive continuum from 2013 to 2014, Naval'nyi's framework of the overall need of Russia's modernization, projected into the usage and productivity of labour, is concretised by the opportunity to replace unpleasant representatives of backwardness and crime with culturally close relatives with qualified skills in labour. In other words, economic frame allows to civilize racist currents of the discussion. At the same time, this dominating frame does not resonate with the issue of supply and demand, the most obvious driving force in any usage of foreign labour. Besides all obvious and possible deviations and inhumanity – spelled out by Naval'nyi – Russia's migration dynamics follows the global dynamics between 'the rich north and poor south': poorly paid jobs in labour markets of richer countries are done by workers of poorer countries. This is exactly the situation between Russia and Central Asia. Russian discussion somewhat suggests that the structural problem of the low productivity of work is exclusively linked to migrants, not to poor

Russian institutions of labour, and the solution would be the elimination of the backward labour by qualified workers. This notion supports Dubin's view on ethnification of Russia's general poor state of affairs as the main explantion of ethno-nationalist sentiments.

Along with growing number of refugees from Ukraine and the worsening eonomic situation the vision of ethnically framed qualified workers as a remedy for the migration problem has gradually merged into a more straightforward xenophobia. For instance, in Kaliningrad the local unemployed were preferred to foreigners, and for those vacancies which were still available, Ukrainians were preferred to Central Asians. In other words, ethnic hierarchies are persistent but the nature of labour has not changed; Ukrainians can do those less paid jobs formerly done by Central Asians (Rosbalt 2014). In September 2014, the newspaper *Nezavisimaia gazeta* pointed out that while the number of refugees from Ukraine had reached one million, Russians' attitudes to them has become more critical (Garmonenko 2014). By citing the poll made by the Russian Foundation of Public Opinion (FOM) in September 2014, almost half of Russians wished to send refugees back to Ukraine as soon as possible while the moods were much warmer in couple of months earlier (ibid.).

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